

Sunday April 2
Lesson 5: Your Will Be Done
Scripture: Matthew 26: 36-46

Context:

Today we continue our spring curriculum, “The Life of Faith.” In the first unit, “The Journey to the Cross,” we are reflecting on the season of Lent and examining the lessons in Jesus’ final time with the disciples. We continue to focus on the gospel of Matthew and the passion events leading up to his suffering, death, and resurrection. Today’s lesson on Palm Sunday looks at Jesus’ final evening with a few of his disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane. The purpose of today’s lesson will be to learn to stay awake to Jesus’ obedience to the cross.

The scripture today comes as part of Jesus’ final evening with his disciples after the Passover meal he shares with them. Following the dinner where Jesus blesses the elements and reveals one will betray him, he takes the disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. Going a little further into the garden, he takes the usual three: Peter, James, and John. And then Jesus goes a little further in to pray on his own.

When Jesus goes to pray on his own, the words and his revelations are deep. As Jesus wrestles with what is about to happen, we see are reminded of a very important fact about the identity of Jesus. The narrative makes a significant contribution to a sound Christology by reminding us Jesus was a genuine human being.¹ As Nicene Christians (those who believe in the Nicene Creed), we affirm both the divinity and the humanity of Jesus; yet unfortunately our reverence tends to cloud the distinction and we “divinize” the human nature.² Jesus being fully human as well as divine holds significance, especially when it comes to the cross.

The passage is significant as Jesus knows what will happen with suffering and the cross. He names the pain to come and is moved by concern of what will happen next. He appears as a normal human being, capable of fear and anxiety.³ Jesus knows suffering will not be the only thing as he also names death: “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me.”⁴ Cup is a metaphor for death and in the Old Testament appears most frequently to the cup as a symbol of “God’s wrath.”⁵ Jesus is asking for another potential solution to the Messiah suffering public shame and the kingdom coming a different way.

Yet even as he prays, Jesus names a “willing spirit” to do what God has asked. In the epistle of the Hebrews, this is explained more as it speaks of the “obedience of Jesus to the cross.” However, we discover throughout the narrative, Jesus is alone. Jesus’s disciples are

¹ Hare, Douglas R.A. “Matthew.” *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2009), 300.

² Ibid. Also see the Nicene Creed to explore in depth. You can find somewhere online or in the United Methodist Hymnal 880.

³ Ibid., 301.

⁴ Matt. 26:39, NRSV.

⁵ Hare, “Matthew,” 301.

constantly asleep, immune to the plight of their Lord and the impending suffering and death. Thus, Jesus will go to be betrayed, abandoned, and placed on trial.

Application

A few years ago, I had the privilege to go to the Holy Land as part of my ordination experience. While the entire trip was incredible, there were definite high holy moments sprinkled throughout the trip. I still remember one such high holy moment being the visit to the Garden of Gethsemane, where there is both still a garden of olive trees and the Church of All Nations containing a giant rock attributed as the place Jesus laid his hands as he prayed.

The Church of All Nations was incredible, as were most of the churches and cathedrals we visited on the trip. Yet what still stands out in my memory is the sweetness and tranquility of the garden. There are olive trees all around and you can smell the sweet flowers releasing their fragrance. One of my favorite discoveries was a tiny little olive tree reaching up, the dew crackling on its leaves.

As I led a devotion in the garden, I was humbled by the view of the city from the area. Lying at the base of a mountain, you could see the view of the city gates of Jerusalem, both the old and the new areas. This means as Jesus prayed, he would have had a direct view of the Roman soldiers coming for him. In the interruptions of his prayer time, Jesus would have seen his imminent betrayal, coming for him with the only escape being to run through the garden and into the hills.

Yet as we know, Jesus did not do so. Instead, he stayed in the garden and prayed three times as we read of today. Jesus knew what was coming and even as he wrestled with it, he was obedient to the will of his Father. Mixed with anguish and tenderness, Jesus followed the call and the mission he had been sent to fulfill.

Human beings, for the most part, will avoid pain at all costs. And for good reason. No one likes the idea of willingly suffering for a cause, however noble the cost might be. As one of my good friend's states, there is no such thing as a bloodless martyr. There is a price we all pay when we make certain choices and decisions. Even with obedience to authority, we might be required to make great sacrifices for a greater good.

American Christians, if we are honest, struggle with this concept of obedience and suffering. We are trained to look for pleasure and excitement. We are geared to look for easy ways out, so we do not have to submit to God or any authority. We love the idea of life and faith being easy, uncomplicated, and honestly without it costing us one thing.

Jesus and the Garden of Gethsemane should step on all our toes, especially as we read the words: "not what I want but what you want." For all of us this means different things. God invites us to a life of obedience, to stay awake to what Jesus has done in our lives and to join him in his kingdom work. As Christians we are called to consider the questions and promises we made to God at different times in our lives and ask if we have truly submitted to the Lord.

For all of us, we made vows to give back to God with our prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness. Do we do those things, or just when it works out for us? For United Methodist clergy, we made vows to go where we are sent and to love and lead the people whom we have been privileged to serve. Do we go with grateful hearts, or do we plot and plan appointments, or even break our promises and seek our own glory? All of us are called to think about Jesus' words "not what I want but you want," and to be transformed in the journey.

If you're like me and ever struggle with questions of God's will and being obedient in the various aspects of discipleship, I invite you to consider going to the "gardens" of your lives and

see what God offers you there. Perhaps one of the reasons I loved the Garden of Gethsemane is because as a nature lover, I always find how God speaks to me there. And thus, I go on walks with my dog or alone, musing the prayer of God's will in my life. As I walk and look around seeing how God is involved in creation, I realize God is also at work in me. God meets us in the garden and reminds us of how Jesus will go with us wherever we go, and he will go with us all the way.

How do we fall asleep to God's will for our lives? What does it mean to you to state, "not what I want but what you want," when praying unto God? Who are people who model obedience to Jesus and inspire you? Why do you think it's easy to push back against the prayer Jesus prays? How will you follow Jesus and fulfill the promises you made unto God? Where is your Garden of Gethsemane where you feel God speaking unto you?

***Below are a few pics from the Garden of Gethsemane. It includes the little tree to inspire me and two overviews of the garden and how you can see city from behind it:



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